



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Update on Methicillin-Resistant Staph Aureus (MRSA)

Uma S. Ahluwalia
Director

October 24, 2007

Dear Colleagues:

This letter is to bring you up to date about how we are handling the current heightened public concerns about MRSA cases in students in the region. Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Services is working closely with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and others to provide information about Community-Associated MRSA and how to prevent it. There is high media interest locally, regionally and nationally and you are probably experiencing calls from patients as well.

In Montgomery County we know of 22 confirmed MRSA cases among MCPS students, mainly athletes as of October 23, 2007; all are recovering. As you are aware, MRSA is not a reportable disease; there are no accurate statistics about its prevalence, however, there are at least two reasons why MRSA appears to be concentrated in school populations. One, our School Health Nurses work closely with our Disease Control staff to identify emerging infections in the early stages. Two, most cases to date appear to be student athletes, although we have anecdotal reports of MRSA infections in police and fire fighters. It is difficult to avoid sharing bacteria in contact sports and, of course, there are many other forms of close contact in the school age group. But, as you know, MRSA is present in our community and it is here to stay.

We are working closely with Montgomery County Public Schools to get information about MRSA prevention to parents, students, coaches and janitorial staff to help them control the spread of MRSA. Guidance that has been distributed to parents and school staff can be found at (www.mcps.k12.md.us/info/mrsa.) We have also sent information to Montgomery County Department of Recreation, private schools, private health and sports facilities, shelters, day care centers, group homes and all county government employees. The CDC fact sheets and other information on community-associated MRSA that may be useful to your patients can be found at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html. Click on "Go to Community-Associated MRSA. A link to this CDC site is also currently on the home page of Montgomery County Government, www.montgomerycountymd.gov. Click on "MRSA Infection. Attached is Interim Guidance from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

We believe that it is important to make a distinction between Health Care-Associated and Community-Associated cases and correct any misinformation that may be contributing to confusion in the public mind. Physicians and other health care providers have an opportunity to take the lead in educating lay people and preventing MRSA infections in our community. The well documented measures to prevent antibiotic resistant staph infections include:

Public Health Services

1. Education about personal hygiene and times for thorough hand washing, avoiding sharing personal items, and cleaning and covering cuts & abrasions
2. Medical evaluation of suspicious boils or skin lesions
3. Consideration of MRSA in the diagnosis of conditions compatible with *S. aureus* infection
4. Collect specimens for culture and sensitivity from patients with abscesses or purulent skin lesions
5. Incision and drainage of abscesses as indicated

We appreciate your help in educating your patients and their families. If you have questions or comments, feel free to call the Disease Control Program at 240-777-1755.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ulder J. Tillman, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ulder J. Tillman, M.D., M.P.H.
Montgomery County Health Officer
and Chief of Public Health Services